

# Translators as publishers: exploring the motivations for non-profit literary translation in a digital initiative\*

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## RÉSUMÉ

Les motivations pour le bénévolat dans le contexte de la traduction littéraire professionnelle ont rarement été étudiées. En effet, les études se sont principalement concentrées sur les motivations des traducteurs amateurs dans les domaines des associations caritatives, le *fansubbing*, TED, Wikipedia, Skype et Facebook. Cet article étudie les motivations pour le bénévolat dans le contexte de ¡Hjckrrh!, une maison d'édition à but non lucratif gérée par des traducteurs qui autopublient des traductions littéraires sous forme de livres numériques. En mars 2018, ¡Hjckrrh! avait publié vingt et un livres électroniques traduits à partir de sept langues, avec la collaboration de quatorze traducteurs. La plupart de ceux-ci sont des traducteurs professionnels expérimentés avec des emplois à temps plein. Fondé sur des entretiens semi-structurés approfondis avec quinze participants, cet article explore les motivations qui amènent ces traducteurs à collaborer à cette entreprise et démontre l'utilité d'une méthodologie inspirée de l'ethnographie pour étudier les traducteurs. Les résultats montrent que traduire pour le plaisir ainsi que les relations personnelles sont des facteurs qui encouragent les traducteurs à participer volontairement à ¡Hjckrrh!. Les conclusions soulignent quant à elles la nécessité de poursuivre les recherches sur des initiatives similaires de publication à but non lucratif.

## ABSTRACT

Motivations for volunteering have rarely been studied in the context of professional literary translators. Instead, studies have mainly focused on amateur translators in areas such as charities, fansubbing, TED, Wikipedia, Skype and Facebook. This paper explores this under-researched topic in the context of ¡Hjckrrh!, a non-profit publisher led by translators who self-publish literary translations in e-book format. As of March 2018, ¡Hjckrrh! had issued 21 e-books translated from seven languages, with the collaboration of fourteen translators. Most of the translators are experienced professional translators with full-time jobs. Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants, this paper explores the translators' motivations for collaborating on this initiative and shows how an ethnography-inspired methodology can be fruitful when studying translators. The outcomes reflect that translating for pleasure and personal relationships are factors that trigger translators' voluntary participation in ¡Hjckrrh!, and the conclusions highlight the need for more research into similar non-profit publishing initiatives.

## RESUMEN

Son pocos los estudios que se centran en las motivaciones para el voluntariado en el contexto de la traducción literaria profesional. En cambio, hay más trabajos que estudian las motivaciones de traductores aficionados en ámbitos como organizaciones benéficas,

*fansubbing*, TED, Wikipedia, Skype y Facebook. Este artículo estudia las motivaciones para el voluntariado en el contexto de ¡Hjckrrh!, una editorial sin fines de lucro gestionada por traductores que autopublican traducciones literarias en formato de libro electrónico. En marzo de 2018, ¡Hjckrrh! había publicado veintiún libros electrónicos traducidos de siete idiomas, con la colaboración de catorce traductores. La mayoría de ellos son traductores profesionales experimentados que trabajan a tiempo completo. A partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas en profundidad a quince participantes de ¡Hjckrrh!, este artículo explora las motivaciones de los traductores para colaborar con esta iniciativa y muestra la utilidad de una metodología inspirada en la etnografía para estudiar a traductores. Los resultados reflejan que traducir por placer y las relaciones personales son factores que incitan a los traductores a participar de manera voluntaria en ¡Hjckrrh!, y las conclusiones destacan la necesidad de investigar más iniciativas similares de publicación sin fines de lucro.

#### MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS/PALABRAS CLAVE

motivations, traduction bénévole, traduction numérique, traduction littéraire, autopublication

motivations, volunteer translation, digital translation, literary translation, self-publishing  
motivaciones, traducción voluntaria, traducción digital, traducción literaria, autopublicación

## 1. Introduction and background

Free time can be considered a shared global resource, a social asset that can be used in collaboratively created projects. Shirky (2010) suggests the term “cognitive surplus” to refer to the aggregate of free time among the world’s educated population. Technological tools help us work together and share information, allowing us to harness this cognitive surplus. Accounts of how we do something with our cumulative surplus, and the motivations behind these initiatives, can help explain the appearance of new behaviours in society.

Understanding what our cognitive surplus is making possible means understanding the means by which we are aggregating our free time; our motivations in taking advantage of this new resource; and the nature of the opportunities that are being created, and that we are creating for each other. (Shirky 2010: 28)

Following this trend, volunteer translation has become of increasing interest to translation scholars, and various studies have explored the motivations of present-day translators in different contexts such as humanitarian and charitable initiatives (Cavalitto 2012; O’Brien and Schäler 2010); fansubbing (Orrego-Carmona and Lee 2017, 87-114; 145-170); Wikipedia (McDonough Dolmaya 2012); TED (Olohan 2014; Cámara de la Fuente 2014); and other for-profit initiatives such as Facebook and Skype (Dombek 2014; Mesipuu 2012). In most cases, volunteer translation refers to non-professional or amateur translation, and fewer studies have explored volunteer professional translation. We have only found one study focusing on literary translation and motivations; De Jong (1999) studied for-profit initiatives that portray publishers as decision makers who control the literary translation industry. Other scholars who have studied the production process of literary translations only mention motivations in passing, such as Buzelin (2006) and Córdoba Serrano (2007). This paper contributes to research on motivation by focusing on this under-researched topic and explores professional book translators’ motivations for collaborating on a

digital publishing initiative. We understand motivations as reasons that stimulate volunteers to accept to participate. The findings provide insights into the relationships between collaboration, motivation and power. *Power* is here understood as one's capacity to decide on aspects concerning the making of and publication of a translation. The difficulty of accessing this type of data, and the fact that it is an initiative that does not have a strong impact on publishing trends (compared with big publishing conglomerates), means that this kind of initiative has rarely been studied.

¡Hjckrrh!<sup>1</sup> is a non-profit digital publisher led by three translators who are involved in publishing literary translations in e-book format. The e-books are published at low cost, and although the idea of sharing the profits of book sales is mentioned, most of the translators also acknowledge that the work is voluntary and consider it a non-paid job because the profits until now have been limited and collaborators have received no reimbursement. It can thus be considered a *de facto* non-profit initiative. The motivations discussed in this article also show that profit is not one of the driving forces behind this publishing initiative. ¡Hjckrrh! is a self-publishing initiative and not a legally established publishing company. In fact, what these translators do is similar to what authors who self-publish their work do: after completing the work, they upload it to Amazon, iTunes and Kobo. As of July 2018, ¡Hjckrrh! had issued 22 e-books translated from seven languages, and fourteen translators had collaborated in the making of these e-books. Most of the translators who collaborated in this initiative have published other books previously and can be considered experienced professional translators with full-time jobs. The outcomes presented in this paper are part of a research project that has documented the making of two translations.

¡Hjckrrh!'s case is not unique; there are other non-profit digital literary translation initiatives. For example, the journal *Asymptote*<sup>2</sup> publishes world literature in English translation. Its chief editor is based in Taiwan and there are collaborators in different parts of the world. *Paper Republic*<sup>3</sup> publishes short stories translated from Chinese into English, in addition to organising other activities such as reading events and publishing fellowships. *China traducida y por traducir*<sup>4</sup> is a Spanish non-profit initiative led by three translators who publish Chinese literature translated into Spanish. *Paper de vidre*<sup>5</sup> is a Catalan online literary initiative that publishes short stories, some originally written in Catalan and some translated from other languages. This article sheds light on the relatively recent phenomenon of publishing translated literature in digital format and in a non-profit environment.

Section 2 briefly reviews the literature on motivations for volunteering. Section 3 introduces the methodology, illustrating how the research team members collected and analysed the data. Section 4 introduces the participants and their backgrounds, and discusses the terms *professional*, *non-professional*, *amateur* and *natural* translation. Sections 5 and 6 illustrate how the interviews were analysed to identify motivations and to produce a set of categories for volunteer translation. Section 5 describes the motivations of participants in relation to roles, and more specifically the core team's motivations for completing certain tasks and assuming specific roles. Section 6 describes the motivations of the participants for collaborating with ¡Hjckrrh!. The conclusions reflect on what has been achieved and on potential avenues for further research.

## 2. Research on motivations for volunteering

Olohan (2014: 19) defines volunteer translation as “translation conducted by people exercising their free will to perform translation work which is not remunerated, which is formally organized and for the benefit of others.” Her study on the motivations of TED translators for volunteering is the only one, as far as we are aware, that also favours an inductive approach. Olohan’s research is based on constructivist grounded theory and uses mixed methods rather than a purely qualitative approach as we do. Her study also differs in that it focuses on the motivations of non-professional translators, while this study considers professional translators (some with more experience than others, as we discuss in Section 4). Olohan identifies six categories of motivations, namely sharing TED benefits, effecting social change, deriving a warm glow, participating in communities, enhancing learning and deriving enjoyment.

The literature on motivations shows that it is generally accepted that there are multiple reasons behind the decision to volunteer. Thus, different authors have tried to categorise motivations into two, three or more categories (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen 1991). Some of the binary taxonomies refer to motivations as extrinsic and intrinsic, as well as egoistic and altruistic, to name but two examples (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen 1991). After reviewing the literature on motivations for volunteering, Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991) conclude that there is a lack of agreement on concepts and terminology, with the same concepts named in different ways and the same terms used for different concepts. There is no consistency in the definitions of categories, and categories have not been demonstrated to be conceptually distinct from one another. These categorisations have also been criticised for being overly simplistic (Barron and Rihova 2011). Furthermore, the positivist nature of these models does not take into account the changes in motivation and “the individuality and subjectivity of the issue, which is somehow demonstrated by the sheer amount of academic literature and different views on motivation in volunteering” (Barron and Rihova 2011: 205). Considering the shortcomings of existing taxonomies, in this study we explore the potential of qualitative, descriptive and ethnographic accounts to understand book translators’ motivations to volunteer and collaborate in the context of a publishing initiative.

## 3. The method: an ethnography-inspired qualitative study

This ethnographic project followed the whole process of the publication of these two e-books, from the moment that the idea of publishing them emerged until the final distribution. We collected three types of data: 1) discursive data to analyse the practices themselves (based on interviews with the participants and reflective diaries based on participant observation); 2) written data related to the management of the translation (email correspondence); and 3) written data connected to the translation and its paratext (namely translation drafts, the website, the blog, social media). The Principal Investigator’s (PI) involvement in this publishing initiative enabled us to gain access to the participants and materials. Maialen Marin-Lacarta participated in the publishing initiative by translating one e-book and revising another translation. This collaboration continued after the data collection for the research project was completed. The authors of this article jointly collected and analysed the data, and a research assistant, Iris Capilla, joined us for the second year of the project. Iris Capilla

has also been involved in the translation of an e-book for ¡Hjckrrh!. Thus, the research team's relationship and collaboration with the members of this publishing initiative are ongoing. We have also published interviews with ¡Hjckrrh!'s collaborators on the publisher's blog. In this way, our research project has also contributed to the dissemination of their work. As researchers, we made an effort to try to follow the "local" logic—for example, in terms of adapting to the lack of deadlines or understanding relationships among participants—, and we experienced the usual tensions of this method; tensions between doing and understanding, participating and observing, keeping certain distance and being involved (Guber 2001: 66).

The main objective of the project has been to document the translation and publication process of this small publishing initiative, inspired by Buzelin's (2007: 135) work, a sociology of translation that focuses "on the production end rather than the reception end." The main differences between our approach and other previous ethnographies in Translation Studies (such as Buzelin 2007) are the focus on a digital initiative (as opposed to traditional publishers), the involvement of a Co-Investigator (Co-I) acting as an external observer to try to keep a certain distance, and the involvement of the PI in the initiative, which gave her a "tripartite identity, as a researcher, a participant and an observer" (Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpí 2018: 122). Having two researchers analyse and interpret the same data led to fruitful discussions about codes and the translation of quotations; it is also a meaningful way to achieve validity (Denzin 2009). Our initial research questions were related to the materiality of the e-book and the translation process; the visibility of translators; and translators' agency and their interactions.<sup>6</sup> The recursive nature of the research methodology has logically yielded new interests, and new research topics have emerged from the data that we have collected, one of them being the motivations of professional literary translators to volunteer for such an initiative.

This article discusses the results of the interviews conducted with fifteen collaborators at ¡Hjckrrh! between May 2016 and July 2017. The participants included the three founding members of ¡Hjckrrh!, nine translators who have translated literary works published by ¡Hjckrrh! (including the PI), the cover designer, a copy-editor and a proof-reader. The interviews were informal and semi-structured. Eight of them were conducted in person and five by Skype, while one of the translators preferred to provide written answers to the questions instead. Except for this last case, all of the interviews were voice-recorded, with prior consent given by the informants. We tried to make the conversations flow naturally and give interviewees the space and freedom to share their opinions (by choosing informal venues, such as a cafe, and keeping an easy-going attitude), which was easier to achieve in face-to-face interviews than through Skype. All the participants we approached accepted to be interviewed, which is unusual and shows their willingness to share their experience. The interviews with the three founding members of ¡Hjckrrh! were conducted jointly by the two researchers; the participation of the Co-I—who was not involved in the publishing initiative—in these interviews was used to grant an "outsider's approach" and to keep a certain distance from the interviewees. The rest of the interviews were conducted by either the PI or the Co-I. We were both in frequent contact with the founding members of ¡Hjckrrh! through our collaboration on the publication of two e-books, regular email correspondence and the use of collaborative reflective diaries and interviews.

The flexible list of topics to be covered in the interviews was designed with the original research questions in mind, but the questions were adapted to the interviewees' answers during the course of the interviews. We asked them to talk about how they started in the profession; which publishers they had worked for; how and why they started collaborating with publishers; what they remembered about each step of the collaboration (the translation, the submission, the revision, the choice of cover, the preface, the synopsis, the information on the website and so forth); their interactions (which people they were in touch with at each step); and how they would compare this experience with other professional experiences. All of the interviews were transcribed and then coded by both researchers using *Atlas.ti* software.<sup>7</sup> This software supports qualitative research by providing a platform and tools for researchers to assign, classify and retrieve codes, as well as to see the relationships among them thanks to code maps that can be automatically generated. There was not a preestablished set list of codes, meaning that the codes were inferred by the researchers from the interviews. The coding of the interviews was distributed equally between the two researchers and peer-revision of coding was regularly conducted throughout the whole process in order to establish a homogenous approach and avoid overlapping among codes. This collaborative and circular process helped us reflect on the topics that were discussed in the interviews. The participants' names have been anonymised; we use pseudonyms instead. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and we translated the excerpts presented in this paper into English. We agree with Reeves-Ellington (1999: 126) that "[t]he purpose of oral history is not so much to reveal facts about events as to uncover feelings about the meaning of those events for the different people who experienced them," which is why we have tried to keep the voice of the participants when translating these excerpts. The main challenge has been to find a "balance between orality and writing" (Reeves-Ellington 1999: 108). To avoid flattening the interviewees' voice, we have maintained most of the repetitions, ellipses, long sentences, and unfinished sentences. However, we have sometimes added content in brackets to achieve clarity.

Based on the data collected in the interviews, this article explores the motivations of translators to participate in this initiative without expecting any reimbursement. The study sample is small and we do not intend to achieve generalizable results. Instead, we offer a detailed account of the motivations of the fifteen participants. Surveys are the most common research method used to study motivation, which means that participants are asked to select motivating factors from a list that has been developed in advance by the researcher (Olohan 2014: 19). However, we deliberately rejected this method, as we were interested in learning about the experience of these volunteer translators from their own perspective and, as reflected in the topics discussed, our interest was not limited to motivating factors. On the contrary, motivating factors were not initially part of our research questions; they were, however, mentioned in all of the interviews, which is how they came to be of interest to us. We have chosen to describe the participants' motivations in detail, quoting from the in-depth interviews. Quotations from interviews are a powerful form of qualitative data, as they provide the participants' perspectives in their own words, giving voice to the translators involved in this publishing initiative, compensating power differentials, and creating a more equitable researcher-informant relationship (Guber 2001: 124).



#### 4. Brief description of the participants

Before examining the interviews, it is useful to contextualise the participants' backgrounds. Among the fifteen interview participants, thirteen are professional translators with experience in literary translation. The other two are the cover designer (Mario), who is an experienced designer, and a proof-reader (Sofía), who has no professional experience in this field.

Defining *professional* might be problematic. On the one hand, Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva (2012: 150) have suggested that professionals are "individuals who designate themselves as 'translators' or 'interpreters' and are recognized (and paid) as such by their commissioners." But what happens when these translators engage in unpaid activities? Do they cease to be professionals? Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva (2012: 150) have also suggested that an activity can be professional or amateur based on the remuneration received: "these mediators can provide their services on an amateur or professional basis, as acknowledged by the remuneration they receive for their work." On the other hand, Antonini, Cirillo, *et al.* (2017: 6) explained that the term *non-professional* "tends to refer non-judgementally to the fact that a given profession or activity is carried out by laypeople, i.e. people who are not qualified in that profession," while Harris (1976: 96) suggested the term *natural translation* to define "the translation done in everyday circumstances by bilinguals who have no special training for it."

Following that logic, the activity these translators conduct within ¡Hjckrrh! can be considered amateur, though not "non-professional" or "natural." However, they identify themselves as professionals, especially if we consider the previous definition of "non-professional," and most of them would not agree to be called "amateur" (with the exception of Jorge and, perhaps, Julia).

We define the participants as *professional* translators (versus *amateur*), based on their experience, training, and engagement with the professional community. Table 1 shows the interviewees' different levels of experience in professional literary translation (FM stands for "founding member").

TABLE 1  
Professional experience of participants

40 years of experience	30 years of experience	20 years of experience	10-15 years of experience	Experience limited to 1-3 literary works
Felipe	Gerardo (FM) and Celia	Juan (FM), Roger (FM), Lara and Raul	Lidia, Daniel and Amaia	Julia, Jorge and Simona

All translators except one have received formal translation training and consider themselves professionals. Eight of them hold an undergraduate degree in translation (some of them with further studies), and four of them have studied philology (either English, Spanish or Arab philology) and have received other training as translators. Julia has attended translation summer schools and Jorge is the only one who does not consider himself a professional translator; instead, he sees himself as a Sinologist or specialist in the Chinese language—even though he has more than eight years of experience as a professional translator and interpreter in a Spanish embassy. Eleven out of the thirteen participants are, or were, actively involved in professional transla-

tor associations. Most of these translators, in addition to contributing to ¡Hjckrrh! in their free time, translate books full time and fight for better conditions (royalties, mention in marketing materials, fair fees and so on). Some of them have other jobs, too. For example, five of the interviewees are also lecturers in translation at various universities: Felipe, Gerardo, Daniel, Amaia and Jorge. The *White Paper of Book Publishing in Spain* (*Libro Blanco de la Traducción Editorial en España*)<sup>8</sup> shows that 62.5% of book translators combine this profession with other professional activities; teaching and creative writing being the most common.

As for the relationship between the participants (see also Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpí 2018), most of them are linked directly to Gerardo: five of them are Gerardo's former students (Roger, Lidia, Daniel, Amaia and Lara); four of them are Gerardo's close friends (Juan, Celia and Mario) or relatives (Sofía); and two of them are Gerardo's colleagues (Raul and Felipe).

Only three interviewees got in touch with ¡Hjckrrh! through other intermediaries. Julia, a former music teacher from Hungary who started translating after her retirement, attended a translation summer school led by Abel, a well-known Hungarian-Spanish translator. Abel put Julia in touch with Gerardo. She translates together with her husband, Ángel, a native Spanish speaker. Simona and Jorge have participated in ¡Hjckrrh! through Amaia, who has involved them in revision tasks (Simona) and translation (Jorge).

These translators consider ¡Hjckrrh! a platform to experiment and refuse to call it a formal "publisher." They draw a line between their commissioned work and what they do for ¡Hjckrrh!. This explains why friendship and trust are key elements, as we will see. ¡Hjckrrh! does not commission translations; they collaborate among friends to bring this initiative forward and publish what they are interested in.

## 5. Motivations and distribution of central tasks at ¡Hjckrrh!

According to Alfer (2015: 26), translation and collaboration are related to "questions of power, equality of participation, and mutuality of influence as intrinsic aspects of practice." In this sense, we argue that differences in power and inequality of participation can depend on motivation. This case study shows that hierarchies, differences in power and the distribution of roles are not always a consequence of an imposed hierarchy. Different degrees of collaboration are determined by motivations for participating. The collaboration of the group of translators that started ¡Hjckrrh! began as a way to take control and publish what they were interested in. Gerardo, the founding member who oversees the editorial tasks, explains how they began.

According to my experience, in the last twenty years I've noticed that translators get involved in more steps [of the process]. Before, we used to submit the translation on paper and that was it; we could forget about it. Later, with the floppy disk, we had to format it in a certain way. Then, with the new dominant business dynamics we had to take care of the copy-editing part, we had to be on top of everything and try to get access to the edited draft and supervise the revision somehow. Another way [of intervention] was to recommend to the publisher our own copy-editor, with whom we worked more as a team. What I mean is that as the publishing dynamics have changed in the last two decades, we have been more and more engaged in the book's manufacturing process and we have come to realise that just by doing a bit more we could do the whole thing on our own. We saw the role of the editor disappear from publishing



houses. Publishers were run by administrative people, commercial staff and bureaucrats, and we were getting involved in parts of the process that we didn't use to work on. Then, a logical conclusion, now that digital technologies are available, is that one could, in reality, leaving aside a few administrative obstacles, physically one knows how to make a book. Making an electronic book is almost like making a website really.

Gerardo also explains that initially the founders of ¡Hjckrrh! wanted to publish translations that they had already done and had been unable to publish, or translations that they were interested in doing.

When we got together, the initial idea was to publish things that we would like to translate or that we had kept somewhere after translating them, to self-publish our translations and give life to projects that are not professional. In practice it hasn't been like that because I am the only one who has published things that I had previously translated or that I wanted to translate, but that was the idea in the beginning, to publish our things. [...] Then, well, there is a combination of things that we have proposed [to other people] and things that we have done ourselves, well, like Juan who translated a detective story in Esperanto that his friend wrote.

Although different participants assume different roles, the boundaries between the roles are fluid and flexible, which distinguishes this initiative from a traditional publishing house. The interviews show that roles, hierarchies and the distribution of tasks are very much related to motivations. Roger explains the distribution of roles between the three founding members in the following way.

Coincidentally, I had to translate a couple of books for Amazon and they needed my IRS number, the USA tax number, so I had to apply for that. And that was the only requirement to open an account with Amazon and get paid for the books that you wanted to upload if you did not want to do it for free. [...] So it all happened a bit by chance and without thinking too much, because we didn't know how much work it would entail. I knew that the technical role could be interesting for me, but I didn't have the time to learn and do it. And the editorial job, I mean we had Gerardo, so I wasn't really interested in that either. It was a bit like each of us already had a [role]. [...] The truth is Gerardo covers a bit of all three roles. He mainly does the editorial role, to name it somehow, but he is also in charge of the Kobo account, because Kobo did not have any fiscal requirement to open an account, perhaps because it's a Canadian company. And that's all; I mean, let's say that I fulfilled the requirements to do it [to be in charge of the Amazon account].

Juan, who is in charge of designing and formatting the e-books, also talks about his role and about the motivations behind the creation of the publishing initiative.

It started as an idea to explore new technologies. The idea was to translate things that we were interested in and self-publish them. [...] So the idea was to publish what we wanted and the digital format allows you to do it with a small investment. So you invest in your work, but that's all basically. We also looked for authors to whom we didn't have to pay royalties or works that were in the public domain, or we reached an agreement with the author saying that he or she would not be paid an advance and that he or she would receive royalties depending on the sales. So we were a group of people, and let's say that Gerardo was the thinking head, he was the driving force. He is the one who has more interest. I said from the beginning that it was a good idea, but that I didn't want to get too involved and that I could promise to do the technical part, the website and the e-book formatting. Then I have also done a few more things, a couple of translations, but well, my original idea was to limit my involvement.

In addition to formatting the e-books and designing and updating the website, Juan has translated one e-book and copy-edited several translations. Gerardo also explains how Roger was originally in charge of the Facebook and Twitter accounts, in addition to uploading books to the Amazon platform, but after some time, Gerardo himself ended up doing some of these things because Roger was very busy and could not do it. Sofía interrupts and explains how much work all this involves.

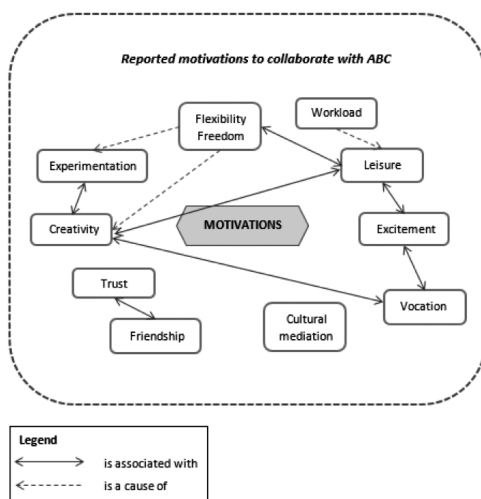
I would like to add something. He was going to take care of those things and then didn't. Well, all this work is on top of our own work. All these people do their jobs to earn a living and some of them get excited and do nice things, but all this is very time consuming.

We observed and experienced that the degree of involvement of the participants who collaborate with ¡Hjckrrh! is determined by their motivation and willingness. In our experience, Gerardo has been open to new ideas and collaborations, and has encouraged the participants to get more involved.

## 6. Motivations to collaborate with ;Hjckrrh!

The following graph shows the different codes related to the motivations of the participants. These codes emerged from the interviews with the participants after close reading and focused coding by both researchers, as explained in Section 3. We have determined that the ten codes included in this part are related to reasons for volunteering after considering the context surrounding the responses from which these codes emerge. In other words, informants either explicitly or implicitly used these ideas to explain why they collaborated with iHjckrrhl. The ten codes related to reasons for volunteering were concerned with 1) flexibility and freedom, 2) leisure, 3) pleasure and excitement, 4) vocation, 5) experimentation, 6) creativity, 7) trust, 8) friendship, 9) workload and 10) cultural mediation.

FIGURE 1  
**Motivations for collaborating with ;Hjckrrh!**



The analysis has identified ten categories of motivation, based on fifteen in-depth interviews, and shows the internal relationships between some of these categories. There could be other motivations apart from those mentioned by the participants during the interviews, but the article only focuses on those that were made evident. These ten categories were regrouped into seven to show how some of them are connected.

### 6.1 Flexibility and freedom

Flexibility and freedom are two of the reasons translators contribute to ¡Hjckrrh!. Julia, who is not a native Spanish speaker and therefore co-translated a story with her husband, says:

The good thing is that Gerardo did not put any pressure on us. I mean, he gave us plenty of time, almost two years, so we could work when we wanted, when we could. That was very convenient.

Lara, another translator, also mentions this as an advantage.

I was free; I mean I did not have a fixed submission deadline. It was a bit like, OK, why don't you have a look at it, start working on it, I'd like it to be published after. I don't know, let's say he proposed the translation to me in February and it was a very short text so he told me to have a look at it and have it ready for, let's say, after the summer, but the deadline was very flexible. So you have the freedom, you know it's just a few pages, and you have time to do it.

Simona, who was asked to compare the translation with the source text as part of the copy-editing process of a Chinese translation, also mentions that she had plenty of time and felt no pressure.

However, Raul thinks that having a deadline helps him focus, so does not always see it as a motivating factor.

I did it at my own pace because Gerardo told me there was no fixed deadline. In fact, at some point we both forgot about it and then remembered a month or so later. If I remember correctly, at some point I told him to give me an approximate deadline because I work better when I have one and it was just a story anyway; so it was about ten or twenty pages, I don't know.

Freedom for these translators means that they do not have the same pressure as in their commissioned translations. They also have the freedom to choose another text or change the way they want to work. Lara explains this in the following excerpt.

It's different when someone from a publishing house calls you and tells you that they have a project for X deadline, and they need you to do it; that's it. In this case he has an idea, he thinks of who could do it, who would be more suitable to do that translation and then contacts you. He proposes it and then he tells you that that's just an idea that he had, but that if you have another idea or want to do it another way, then it's up to you.

Cecilia mentions that the freedom and the lack of a fixed deadline have to do with the fact that the translation is not remunerated.

He told me: "Look, I have this, could you do it..." It's a commission, of course, it's *ad honorem*, because we are not paid, so I did it at my own pace, slowly [...]. It even took me a while to start translating. But once I started I wanted to get it done, and it took

me some time because I was doing it in my own free time, on weekends, during my free time, one day a couple of pages and so on.

## 6.2 *Leisure and excitement*

In the previous excerpt Cecilia also mentions free time. This idea of leisure, understood as the use of free time for enjoyment, is also mentioned by other interviewees. “I did it when I could do it, when I had time that I could use for that, and not in a rush, under pressure and with my head in another place,” says Lara. “I combined it with other things, and let’s say it’s more a thing that I did for leisure,” says Juan.

Julia, who has had a shorter career as a literary translator, also mentions that she and her husband do this for pleasure, now that they have retired.

We always thought that we would love working as translators together [...]. Then, when we retired we started working to become translators.

Gerardo talks about founding ¡Hjckrrh! as a leisurely activity, too.

[T]his project was not meant to make enough profit to make a living or to build a company. This was meant to be something that we can do in our free time and for the pleasure of doing it.

In these last two quotations, Julia and Gerardo both refer to pleasure and enjoyment. The idea of feeling joy, excitement and passion comes up in various interviews. Lara says:

Either you are passionate about it and you do it motivated by that personal relationship or you don’t feel any excitement and you don’t do it, I guess. [...] [W]hen you share the information you have found while you do the translation you get excited, because sharing the process makes it more exciting [...]. Working like this is a huge pleasure. [...] This is related to what I was telling you before about the thrill you feel when it’s a personal project, and this gets you hooked. I get hooked, I get involved.

Juan also explains Gerardo’s excitement.

I said I’ll do it, I’ll translate it, but right now I don’t feel like writing a preface. I didn’t have time. And Gerardo always gets excited and so he did it.

Lara echoes this view:

He started selecting stories with the idea to do a collection about the Great War, which is one of the topics that he is passionate about, and then he found stories in many languages and looked for collaborators, people he knew and people who would be interested and available to do short translations that would not take too much time.

Lara also mentions that she felt more and more excited when she started collecting information about the translation and, especially, when she started sharing it with Gerardo. As she recalls, they were both talking on the telephone and, at the same time, searching for information on the story she was translating, and as Lara explains she enjoyed sharing “the process” of translation. While discussing copyright issues with e-book platforms with Gerardo and Sofía, she also expresses the enjoyment of learning about this.

You don’t know how much we’ve learned. All this means learning step by step and trying to solve problems you find on the way. Without knowing exactly how things work. You need a great investigative spirit, that’s true, and willingness to solve problems.

Sofia also mentions enjoyment in reading the translations and being a proof-reader.

I am not a professional in this field. My profession has nothing to do with this, but I like reading, and I enjoy participating and helping and I enjoy discovering from time to time things that others have overlooked. And that's what I do.

### 6.3. *Vocation*

Excitement, joy, pleasure and passion are also related to the idea of this activity being vocational, understood in the sense of a calling, a strong feeling to choose a particular career. According to Amaia, "those who have published with ¡Hjckrrh! have done it because they really felt like it and they wanted to do it." She also mentions the idea that she collaborates with ¡Hjckrrh! because she loves translating and wants the text to be available for other people.

Nobody does a translation for ¡Hjckrrh! to make ends meet. I think we do this because... for art's sake, I don't know. There isn't a better way to describe this. You do it because it's a text that you want to see published and you think it's in good hands because you know you are going to work well with those people.

Daniel, Roger, Lara, and Amaia mention translation as a vocational activity. "I studied translation thinking that you could only work as a book translator, I mean, that's what I wanted to do from the beginning," says Daniel.

### 6.4 *Creativity and experimentation*

Freedom is also related to stylistic experimentation, as we can see in Daniel's interview.

It was the perfect opportunity to try out things that you probably would not suggest to a publisher with whom you only have a commercial relationship. Perhaps it would not be easy to convince a person, like a normal publisher, who has invested money to publish a book, to experiment with the product, because that person will be afraid that the book will not be well received and it will not sell and he or she will lose money and so on. So this was the perfect testing ground to try out something different. In Spanish there is not much tradition of translating dialects in a special way, and well, we tried it.

As Daniel also explains in the prologue of the translation, in Spain, translators tend to avoid using dialects in their translations, and instead neutralise original dialects by using standard language. This was also the case of the previous translation of the short story he retranslated. He refers to a certain scepticism towards the translation of dialects using other dialects. In his translation, though, Daniel invented dialects which do not intend to reflect existing Spanish varieties, in order to avoid "fake parallelisms between the linguistic varieties used in the original and those used in the translation".<sup>9</sup> In this sense, he was able to "experiment" with language and provide more creative solutions for the translation of dialects. Daniel also mentions that freedom to intervene in the selection of texts is something that he has also experienced with small publishers.<sup>10</sup>

The way ¡Hjckrrh! works is a bit similar, perhaps taken to the extreme, to small publishers: the more personal treatment, the fact that we discuss small details of the book and not just style correction. For example, I translated short stories by John O'Hara for a

small publisher and they sent me 25 stories. They told me: if there is any story you don't like, we can change it, propose an alternative.

Gerardo also mentions experimentation as one of the motivating factors in creating ¡Hjckrrh!: “We do it because we all think it's kind of fun. We enjoy doing this kind of thing and trying out new things and seeing what happens.” In this quote, Gerardo refers to the challenge of publishing translations in different formats (mobi, epub, etc.) without any specialised knowledge about them, but also to the exciting feeling of self-publishing short e-books that are sold for a symbolic price.

The same factor is, according to him, one of the reasons other translators agree to collaborate.

We tell them that this is an experiment, a kind of investment, and we tell them about the project. These are translators that we trust, people who know us, and they are excited to experiment with this.

Freedom is also connected to creativity, which is another motivating factor mentioned by the translators. Juan says in relation to this: “Well, in this case, you have more freedom. More freedom to do your own project. Well, it's different... And in general it's more creative because in other cases it's much more limited.” Here Juan, the e-book designer, is referring to the possibility of choosing how to design the layout of the e-books without depending on anyone else. This freedom to choose and experiment is also visible in the Zamenhof font selected for the book covers because Juan is an enthusiastic Esperantist. Daniel used this freedom to experiment with the translation of dialects, as mentioned before.

Mario, who is in charge of designing the book covers, also mentions freedom and the fact that there is no pressure to do things in a rush.

### 6.5 *Trust and friendship*

Trust is another motivating factor that is mentioned by the interviewees. Mario refers to this as follows:

There is friendship, so we trust each other and there is no problem. [...] When I have worked for institutions, it is often difficult to decide on a cover and on how the typography fits with the image and so on. Sometimes this process is difficult and the relationship with the customer is not as close as with Gerardo. I know I can trust him in that sense.

Very much related to trust is friendship, which is also mentioned by the translators. Felipe says:

As we became friends through the University Translation Departments, he asked me if I wanted to translate a story for this collection [...]. I met him at the University, because I used to go there to attend PhD defences and so on.

He adds that friendship involves trust and makes work easier: “Being friends makes it easier. What I mean is that we get on well [with Gerardo] and I can write to him and ask any question.”

Friendship as a motivating factor is also mentioned by Lara and Lidia. In a previous excerpt, Lara explains that sharing the translation process makes it more exciting. Lidia stresses the importance of friendship when working with ¡Hjckrrh!.



Working for another publisher and for ¡Hjckrrh! are two very different things. But I don't think it has anything to do with the publishing house itself, but with the friendship that we all share. We all studied together and we learnt to translate as a team with Gerardo. It's like working with family.

She also thinks that the size of ¡Hjckrrh! means that the relationship between the different people involved is much closer: "In ¡Hjckrrh!'s case, it's so small, so small that the relationship is really personal."

Other interviewees also mention their friendship with Gerardo or the other participants in the initiative. Daniel even concludes that translating for ¡Hjckrrh!, in his case, "was really a thing between friends." Although they do not explicitly refer to "collaborative work" or to the sense of belonging to a group, "friendship" probably intersects with these ideas. Taking part in a team project is a very specific kind of sensation slightly different from the more social "friendship" mentioned in the interviews.

Most of the translators explain how they know each other, how they know Gerardo and for how long.<sup>11</sup> Gerardo also mentions that he contacts translators that he knows.

All of them are people we know—translators who I consider friends and who I think might be interested in participating in such a project. There were only two translators I didn't know, but a friend who could not translate the text that I proposed him put me in touch with them.

Thus, friendship is not only a motivating factor but also a feature of how this initiative works.

Even though trust is usually related to friendship, personal reputation may also be a motivating factor. Jorge explains that the first reason he agreed to collaborate with ¡Hjckrrh! was "because of the person: because the proposal came from Amaia, a person about whom I had heard very good things."

## 6.6 *Workload*

Some interviewees mention the relatively light workload of the translation project as a reason to accept a collaboration. Most translations published by ¡Hjckrrh! are either short stories or novellas of around 10,000 words. This light workload is an advantage according to some of the interviewees. The workload is also related to "leisure" because the short length of the assignments allows the translators to do them in their free time.

"If you put everything together there is some workload, because doing this means work, but it will not prevent you from meeting your professional commitments," says Lara.

"The text was not too long. That's a good thing for those of us who are always busy with many things, because it would be complicated for me to accept a translation of 500 or 200 pages," says Jorge.

The cover designer also brings this up.

The book covers are designed relatively quickly because [...] the typography and the format of the box are maintained; the only thing that changes is the image. So I only need a couple of days or maybe three days to do them. The cover that took me the longest maybe took a week, but I don't mean eight hours a day.

However, one translator told Gerardo he did not have the time to collaborate and put him in touch with Julia and her husband. According to Gerardo, this is the only person he has approached who has been unable to collaborate with ¡Hjckrrh!. He also explains that this translator is now working on another translation for ¡Hjckrrh!.

Then he told me that the text was a bit too long, but that he would find someone and that he was really interested in collaborating with us. So in the end he has now found another story that he wants to translate, a shorter one, because the ones I gave him to choose from were too long.

The three founding members also mention that the workload is much heavier than they expected when they started, so there is a divergence of opinion on this topic. Most of the translators agree to collaborate because the texts are short, but the workload for the three founding members is heavier than they expected. Roger explains this as follows.

¡Hjckrrh! happened a bit by chance and without thinking too much, because we didn't know the amount of work that this would demand [...]. I was not aware of the amount of work it would take. [...] When I finish translating what I have to do to earn a living, I don't have the energy to translate for ¡Hjckrrh!.

Gerardo also mentions this unexpected workload in the case of *Lady Nicotina*,<sup>12</sup> by Barrie, translated from English. It had already been published in print by another publisher, but the translator had the rights to publish it in digital format and Roger encouraged her to publish the e-book with ¡Hjckrrh!. Once they started the editing task, they realised the “huge amount of work that had to be done,” in Gerardo's words, because it was more than 200 pages. In fact, Gerardo explains that most translations published by ¡Hjckrrh! are relatively short, with the exceptions of *Lady Nicotina* and *Viaje a Faramido*,<sup>13</sup> by Karinthy, translated from Hungarian.

“So people do it because they enjoy doing it, and because it is usually a short translation, with the exception of *Viaje a Faramido* and *Lady Nicotina*, which are real books. But she had already published *Lady Nicotina* in print, so she had been paid for it, and did not mind not being paid again,” Gerardo explains.

Juan also explains how time consuming his role is.

At the beginning it took me a long time to do the first epubs. It was very complicated because it is a rather clumsy programming language and it doesn't allow much flexibility, so you have to do lots of tricks and use the backdoor to do things that it doesn't allow you to do otherwise. Besides, I was learning the programming language at the same time as I did it. But later, I mean by now, it's quite easy and I do it fairly quickly. And I do the code for the website, too.

In the previous quote, Juan refers to the edition of the e-books and having to learn about new programming codes to compose them. When he did not know how to edit the e-books with the possibilities of the program he was using, he had to figure out other solutions (“tricks” and “backdoor[s]”) so that the final layout of the e-books looked as they expected. This, of course, took some time, as e-books are more complex than PDF files. The formatting of illustrations in *Lady Nicotina* was one of the challenges that he described in more detail.

### 6.7 *Cultural mediation*

Jorge explicitly mentions the desire to act as a cultural mediator as a motivating factor for participating in a translation for ¡Hjckrrh!.

Here we know very little about Hong Kong literature [...]. This was also appealing to me, the fact that you work with authors from Hong Kong, to make them more visible, right? To let people know that in Hong Kong, apart from lots of money, business and finance, there is also literary and cultural life. I mean, that was an interesting point to me.

Other interviewees, such as Raul and Amaia, mention related ideas such as a particular attachment to a text or an author and the wish to make them available in another language. In this sense, Gerardo and Juan say that they want to select stories from the Great War from different languages and translate from as many languages as possible, which implicitly leads to this idea of the translator as cultural mediator.

## 7. **Conclusions**

Participating in this digital literary translation initiative as translators, copy-editors and researchers allowed us to gain access to other participants. Instead of studying motivations from a pre-established set of categories, we favoured an inductive approach and chose to describe their motivations in a detailed way, quoting from in-depth semi-structured interviews. In this way, we constructed a narrative connecting the different motivating factors and giving voice to different opinions. An approach inspired by ethnography provides a focused way to understand the work of translators. This paper responds to the need to study professional literary translators' motivations for volunteering. As Olohan (2014: 18) put it, enquiry into volunteer translation "necessitates empirical studies, applying interdisciplinary approaches, models and methods." Of course, fifteen interviews cannot be considered representative of all literary translators' motivations for volunteering. Our aim is not to reveal all possible motivations in a broader context, but rather to focus on this specific group of translators to demonstrate the usefulness of an ethnography-inspired qualitative method in studying motivation and to explore literary translators' attitudes towards their job.

Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen's (1991) empirical study showed that volunteering is a unidimensional social phenomenon. Volunteers act on different types of motives and what they have in common is that they look for a rewarding experience that produces satisfaction. Although they "may perceive different combinations of issues to be rewarding, all continuing volunteers benefit from the volunteer experience" (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen 1991: 282). Their study demonstrated that bidimensional, tridimensional or complex models classifying motivations into categories such as altruistic, egoistic, material, social, and so on are not valid, as motives overlap. In our study, the idea of pleasure, satisfaction or reward has appeared more explicitly under 6.2. (leisure and excitement), but the remaining motivations that we have described are also coherent with this unidimensional definition of volunteer motivations. This unidimensional theory would also mean that there is no such thing as complete altruism. We have seen a certain correlation between the degree of motivation of participants and the level of involvement (in terms of roles and tasks) in the publish-

ing project, of course this is not exclusive to ¡Hjckrrh! or to translation practices, but it becomes very evident in informants' responses. Interestingly, translators do not refer to pragmatic factors as a reason for engaging in ¡Hjckrrh!, for instance to gain visibility as translators (the vast majority of translators already work as literary translators), to improve their translation or language skills (as is often the case in fansubbing) or to use ¡Hjckrrh! as a possible platform for the dissemination of certain authors in order to reach more conventional publishing houses that may eventually get interested in publishing their translations for commercial purposes. Eagerness to act as cultural mediators is not among the most mentioned motivations, contrary to what might have been expected. Instead, subjective and emotional factors (friendship, trust, vocation, excitement, etc.) are key in understanding the involvement of these translators.

Furthermore, the fact that some of them value ¡Hjckrrh!'s possibilities in terms of creativity and experimentation—translators feel empowered to suggest ideas, to intervene in other phases of the publishing process (see also Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpí 2018; 2019) and to use certain translation techniques that they might not be able to use in other publishing environments—reinforces the idea that literary translation can be understood as a form of art. There might be other publishing initiatives that also favour translators' creativity and experimentation, but the fact that ¡Hjckrrh! is non-profit relieves translators from time constraints and commercial pressures. As a matter of fact, with time constraints, the possibility of leisurely discussing findings by telephone, as one of the translators mentions, would not be possible. In a similar vein, De Jong (1999) concluded that Dutch literary translators were motivated by intrinsic factors of the job that have to do with creativity and problem solving when translating a piece of literature. Our analysis also reflects the idea that translation can be an exciting activity (translation for the enjoyment of translating), which was also mentioned by Olohan (2014: 26), and suggests the possibility of understanding translation as a pleasant artistic activity.

These motivations might also be possible thanks to the non-traditionality of this publishing model platform, as participants define it. Participants' sense of agency is stronger than in traditional publishing paths, an aspect which clearly merits attention and has been further described in Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpí (2018). ¡Hjckrrh! also reflects democratization or a flattening of the publishing model: for example, participants can suggest titles for translation, they do not have to sell their ideas to a board of directors, and they can decide collaboratively throughout the whole process (see also Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpí 2018; 2019), which are all factors that may increase participants' motivations for engaging in it. As also mentioned in Marin-Lacarta (2019), this platform is a response to more rigid publishing structures, and thus ¡Hjckrrh!'s model can also be seen as a counter measure to power in another way.

In sum, the conclusions show that this case study contributes to the field on different levels: methodological possibilities (and the use of ethnography), motivations and voluntary translation (and even volunteer work in general), professional literary translators' attitudes towards the job, and the publishing field (non-profit publishers versus commercial publishers). The recent interest in organizational culture in translation studies might lead to more research in this direction and comparing our findings with participants' motivations in traditional publishing practices would open new avenues of research.

## NOTES

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  4. *Inicio* (Last update: 2 February 2011): China traducida y por traducir. Consulted on 21 July 2020, <<http://china-traducida.net/>>.
  5. *Qui som* (Last update: 22 May 2014): Paper de vidre. Consulted on 21 July 2020, <<https://pdvcontes.wordpress.com/qui-som/>>.
  6. For more information on this topic, see Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpí (2018).
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  10. For more on how this publisher fits in the larger context of the Spanish publishing field, see Marin-Lacarta (2019).
  11. We have analysed the relationships between the participants and divided them into first- and second-order network zones elsewhere (Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpí 2018).
  12. BARRIE, James Matthew (1890/2014): *Lady Nicotina*. (Translated from English by Libertad AGUILERA) Barcelona: ¡Hjckrrh!
  13. KARINTHY, Frigyes (1916/2015): *Viaje a Faremido*. (Translated from Hungarian by Judit FALLER and Andrés CIENFUEGOS) Barcelona: ¡Hjckrrh!
- [Insert notes here]

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